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A. G. Abell's Hawaiian Interlude

Worse than being rejected and ignored is seeing your name misspelled in public print. Alexander Gurdon Abell suffered these indignities, and more. But at life's end he could triumphantly echo Black Bart—fellow townsman, stagecoach robber (29 hits), and self-styled “Po8”:

I've labored long and hard for bread,
For honor and for riches,
But on my corns too long you've tread,
You fine-haired s—— of b——.

In 1904 the *Chronicle* called Abell “one of the most prominent men of the pioneer days of San Francisco.” This is the story of his Hawai'i interlude.

First, though, must come the de rigeur biographical fill-in. It's short and—for the early years—spotty. Alexander's parents were Gurdon and Anna (Morgan) Abell of Connecticut. He was born in New York state on June 29, 1818. In 1820 the family moved to Augusta, Georgia, where the elder Abell became a cotton dealer and slaveholder and developed into the stock “wealthy eccentric” (poor oddballs are called nuts). According to one source, Alexander was sent to a school in New Haven in 1826. Similarly fuzzy information is that he was a clerk in the State Department in 1841, that he was at one time

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FIG. 1. Alexander Gurdon Abell, consul, critic, and merchant. (Photo courtesy of the Dearborn Historical Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.)

John Tyler's secretary, and that Tyler, when president, sent Abell to Texas with important despatches for Sam Houston.

We reach firm ground in 1844. Tyler was running for reelection (he backed out later), and Abell produced a "still useful" campaign biography. His reward: nomination for U.S. consul at Marseilles. The

Senate rejected him, but Tyler persisted with another nomination—this one for the consulship at the Sandwich Islands. It went through. Abell's commission to "the Island of Hawaii &c." was dated January 16, 1845 (at that time, presidential inaugurations occurred in March). The new official and his recently wed bride, Sarah—also vice-consul Giles Waldo and his wife—left New York on the American bark *Toulon* on February 10. Six months and two days later, the party walked down the gangplank in Honolulu. Its citizens gave Abell the once-over. He was five-ten, had light hair, hazel eyes, and a spare build—and had been fired already, though he didn't know it.¹

The Abells and their two servants moved in temporarily with William Hooper, a partner in the defunct Ladd and Co. and, as acting agent for commerce and seamen, Abell's predecessor. But they soon found permanent quarters in Charles Brewer's two-story wooden prefab on the Waikiki-*makai* corner of Fort and Beretania streets (the Brewers left Hawai'i on October 18). Congenial housemates were the Navy Lieutenant Thomas H. Stevens family of Middletown, Connecticut. Stevens was the U.S. naval storekeeper. The young couples kept open house and put up Commodore Sloat of the U.S.S. *Savannah* in early September.²

Abell found Honolulu "far more pleasant" than expected. Society abounded; within a day or two of his arrival twenty or thirty ladies called, also "any number of gentlemen." The climate delighted; the country charmed. Sarah noted little greenery and few flowers or birds in town. There were some "handsome houses" surrounded by ugly adobe walls. Everything looked dusty. But two beautiful valleys beckoned riders. Friends, books, and music made time fly. An accomplished pianist, Sarah had many chances to perform. The instruments were common in town. She had language facility, too. While Alex could mumble a few Hawaiian words by April 1847, Sarah could chatter away fluently. Abell explained: "women learn languages more easily than men, as nature seems to have ordained that they should do the most talking!"

The Abells started a family in Honolulu. They had two children. One, Emilie, appeared in January 1847. At the end of November 1846, the prospective parents were happy. They felt no regret at having come to Hawai'i.³

Now we reverse the coin. Official machinery winched Abell into

office: U.S. Commissioner George Brown forwarded Abell's commission to William Hooper; Hooper presented it to Foreign Minister Robert C. Wyllie; the king approved; Abell got *exequatur*. Hooper made sure that it applied to the whole kingdom. Only the official reception remained. Abell described it to his father:

I was presented to His Majesty, King Kamehameha III, last Thursday evening [Sept. 25], being my first official visit. On that occasion I presented "at Court" Mrs. Abell, Lieutenant Stevens, U.S.N. the U.S. Naval storekeeper & his Lady (both young and lately married like ourselves & great cronies of ours) & Capt. Davis of a Merchant ship [the bark *Mindoro*], who had a sword to present to the King. The copper colored gentry did the business very well. The palace, a very handsome house, was well lighted, the King stood in the center of the room, with *Her* most copper colored Majesty, the Queen, on his left & the wives of the high Chiefs at her left in the order of their rank, to the number of a dozen, all in white dresses, & on the right of the King were his Premier, and ten or a dozen high chiefs, all dressed in full regimentals, swords, epauletts [*sic*] etc, like the King, besides his three White Ministers, & sundry others. The Minister of Foreign [Relations] preceded me into the room, the Lord High Chamberlain (no joke I assure you) sung out "the American Consul," & the said Minister introduced me to the King—to whom I made a little speech [*sic*], assuring him how happy I was to have that opportunity to pay my respects to him declaring my intention to do all in my power to aid in completing the work he had so far so successfully carried on, of civilizing & increasing the happiness & means of information in his little Kingdom, & expressing my hope that all communication between his Govt & myself might always be of the most pleasant & harmonious nature &c, &c, &c, to all which he vowed & said 'twas "*Nui Matai*," [*sic*] which meant "very good." I then presented my companions, of course I was done up in my full uniform, the handsomest in the islands. . . .

The new consul had *ex officio* functions. Custom demanded a visit to every man-of-war stopping at Honolulu. He had to formalize the appointment of a vice-consul (Waldo) for Lahaina. But commercial duties were the heart of the job. Abell got settled at the start of the fall whaling season and was soon buried in work.

George Brown's interdiction (discussed soon) added the burden of diplomacy. Here Abell charged into an arena littered with the

wreckage of American relations. In late September 1845, he wrote that he was on good terms with everybody "which in *this* place no other man I believe, can say." But in April 1847, the battle-scarred ex-consul predicted that U.S. Commissioner Anthony Ten Eyck "is likely to have as much trouble with the scamps of this government, as his predecessor, & I & my predecessor had, & indeed as all the foreign representatives here have had. They are a precocious [precious?] set of scoundrels." Not nice, but Abell's forecast hit the bullseye and confirmed the *Polynesian's* gripe about "the discordant social condition of our community," which harbored many an equal-opportunity bad-mouther.⁴

A short review of the diplomatic wars clarifies Abell's situation:

John Coffin Jones, Jr.: First U.S. agent for commerce and seamen, appointed by Secretary of State John Q. Adams on September 19, 1820. On November 21, 1837, Kamehameha III and leading chiefs asked that Peter A. Brinsmade be named. Jones had broken Hawaiian laws. With good reason Ross Gast titled Jones's biography *Contentious Consul*. "Consul" is inaccurate but sounds better than "agent." He could have added "Concupiscent."

Peter A. Brinsmade: Acknowledged his appointment in May 1838 and took office on April 9, 1839. Brinsmade was a partner in Ladd and Co. In 1841 he left for the United States and Europe to raise capital for the foundering business. Although he didn't return (dead broke and in debt) until March 1846, he was designated the first U.S. consul at Honolulu on July 5, 1844. Abell owed his appointment to Brinsmade's long absence.

William Hooper: Brinsmade tossed the baton of acting agent to Hooper, another Ladd and Co. principal. Hooper never referred to himself by any other title. More about him follows.

George Brown: In March 1843, Brown became the first U.S. commissioner to the Sandwich Islands, a diplomatic post. Brown quarreled bitterly with the Hawaiian government, most notably over the case of John Wiley, an American seaman charged with rape in 1844 (the standard penalty: a \$50 fine). Brown insisted that Wiley be tried before a jury handpicked by Hooper. Hawaiian authorities refused. Brown then said that G. P. Judd had threatened officers of C. Brewer and Co. An official hearing cleared Judd. Hostilities escalated. In September 1844, Kamehameha III demanded Brown's recall. Then,

on July 29, 1845, the king interdicted Brown from correspondence with any department of the Hawaiian government, and another complaint went to Washington. Brown was now *persona non everything*.

This left Hooper to do both his job and Brown's. But he was already on bad terms with local officials. There had been the Wiley blowup, a dispute over Joe Bedford's land, now the Brown interdiction. Hooper also accused the government of putting the arm on ships' officers and men; they felt pressured to swear allegiance to Kamehameha III to avoid paying the \$60 required for a temporary residence. Soon Hooper fired a salvo aimed at "repeated illegal and unjust proceedings of high officers in the employ of the government . . . towards citizens of the United States . . . threats against American citizens . . . and . . . repeated insults which have been offered to the government of the undersigned, and especially the more recent one of interdicting all communication with George Brown. . . ." Hooper also castigated the courts of O'ahu. In this and following years "insult," "libel," "outrage," and "slander" sliced the air like tin roofing in a hurricane. As he headed for the exit, Hooper voiced a parting regret: he had hoped to keep his post long enough to get an apology from the Hawaiian government for indignities offered him. Fat chance. Such was Abell's official heritage as he assumed Brown's and Hooper's duties.⁵

Another complication appeared. Abell came just as massive changes restructured Hawai'i's government. On September 15, 1845, the Reverend Lorrin Andrews began his labors as judge of the new Court of O'ahu, handling "all cases affecting directly or collaterally the rights and interests of foreigners"—truly a "hot seat." In mid-February 1846, an act to organize the executive departments took effect. This law created government machinery and the bureaucracy to run it, thus setting up a shooting gallery of public officers on which critics could test their marksmanship. In his reminiscences, Henry L. Sheldon wrote that "the officials of the Hawaiian Government in those days were decidedly unpopular with a large majority of the foreign residents." This decidedly included Abell, nicknamer extraordinary, who favored the ministers with monikers such as "Snap" and "Turtle."⁶

It is not surprising, then, that Abell soon found himself at odds with the king's government. Skirmishes involving his office and prerogatives defined the issues contested in a series of cases:

John Wiley case: It just wouldn't go away. Wiley got his \$50 fine, but Hooper and Brown denied its validity because, they said, the jury was drawn improperly. Soon after Brown's interdiction, Abell demanded a new trial for Wiley. Not granted. The consul then attacked Judd in official correspondence. The privy council thought it detected Brown's foul hand pulling Abell's strings.

William Hughes case: On October 29, 1845, Hughes, a British sailor on the American whaleship *California*, got his discharge from Abell. But O'ahu governor Mataio Kekūānoa'ā objected: no captain could leave or discharge seamen ashore without the governor's prior consent. Therefore, Captain Lawrence broke the law, and Abell abetted him. Abell advised Hughes to go home in the *California* and secure his legal rights in the United States. Hughes went to Andrews's court when Lawrence refused to pay his wages (about five barrels of oil or \$64.85 including court fees). In court, Lawrence vowed he wouldn't pay and threatened resistance. Without Abell's knowledge, deputy sheriff Francis Funk was ordered to take a boatload of men (some armed) to board the *California* and execute judgment. There Funk found Lawrence on deck, cutlass in hand, hollering that anybody who set foot on his ship was a dead man. The crew, armed with harpoons and whaling spades, lined the rail. This critique of his activities inspired Funk to return ashore, where some thirty soldiers waited. During the crisis, musket shots rent the air. Hotheads talked of sailors taking the town and raising the American flag. Others swore that if a single Hawaiian boarded the *California*, five hundred of them would be slaughtered. A shot from the fort missed. But the whole affair blew over when Hughes withdrew his complaint, and the *California* took off. In the aftermath, Attorney General John Ricord delivered a long opinion, the *Polynesian* called Abell a liar, and the consul fumed: "A violent outrage was attempted upon an American ship . . . in this harbor, and a gross insult offered to me and to the government of the United States. . . ." Again Hawaiian authorities declared that Abell acted under Brown's dictation—a man "who is always bent on mischief."

Thomas Hewlings case: This second officer of the whaleship *Helvetia* was late for breakfast. He ordered steward John Andrews to fix him eats. Andrews told Hewlings in effect to go to hell. Hewlings pushed Andrews to the cabin door and repeated his order. Andrews clinched Hewlings and tried to hit him. Hewlings socked Andrews.

The affair wound up in the Court of O'ahu, which fined Hewlings \$6.00. Abell denied the court's right to interfere with internal discipline aboard ship. Andrews replied that his court didn't claim such jurisdiction. Abell said that the fine wouldn't be paid voluntarily, and that he would hold the Hawaiian government responsible for damages if authorities used force to collect the fine. Abell reported the case to Secretary of State James Buchanan. He accused Wyllie of "almost a manic love of writing long dispatches"; Ricord, he said, was "considered on all hands to be actually insane." Abell's judgment: "Lunacy is indeed the most charitable reason to assign for many of these acts." One question remained unanswered: Did Hewlings get that breakfast?

John Phaland case: In December 1845, Phaland, also of the *Helvetia*, visited Abell in the company of a constable. He had been arrested as a deserter. Phaland showed Abell's signed discharge. Abell went to Lahaina. When he returned on Christmas Day, Phaland was still in jail. Abell insisted that Phaland had broken no law. The consul had already discharged one hundred or two hundred American seamen without their being arrested. Ricord wrote that Phaland was a "statute" (statutory) deserter since he lacked the governor's permission to be ashore. Abell's reply angered Hawaiian officials: his duty was to respect Hawaiian port laws "so far as they do not contravene any evident and express rights of citizens of the U. States." Abell also expanded Hooper's earlier complaint: any American seaman who went to get permission to stay ashore had to pay \$1 and post a \$60 bond that he would not stay more than sixty days. Sailor boarding-house keepers and others who usually put up the bond charged about \$5. At the end of the sixty days, the man had to pay \$60 or take the oath of allegiance to the king. Abell averred that G. P. Judd reneged on his promise that the consul's discharge would be enough to let sailors stay ashore the said sixty days. He demanded the same rights for Americans as the French enjoyed under their treaty and (uh-oh) threatened to press claims for damages before the next American naval commander to visit Honolulu. Wyllie lodged accusations against Abell with the U.S. secretary of state, enclosing a batch of official correspondence big enough to choke an alligator. And the *Polynesian* cranked out another vitriolic editorial.⁷

In March 1846, ex-consul P. A. Brinsmade literally blew back into

town. He hardly had his land legs before he filed a \$50,000 slander suit against editor J.J. Jarves of the *Polynesian*. At the hearing, witnesses John G. Munn, Stephen Reynolds, and E. H. Boardman refused to take Ricord's oath. Ricord had them tossed into the fort for contempt. Abell, demanding redress and attacking Andrews's court, fired off a protest to O'ahu's governor. Brinsmade was then denied a jury trial; his claim went to the arbitrators of Ladd and Co.'s "grievances."⁸

Into these troubled waters sailed the U.S.S. *Congress* on June 10, 1846. It brought George Brown's successor, Anthony Ten Eyck, and Joel Turrill, the new U.S. consul. The party included William H. Hubbard, the incoming vice-consul for Lahaina. Our focus: Turrill. He was fat and twice Abell's age—an old friend of President James K. Polk, with whom he had served in Congress. Turrill got his appointment months before Abell took over the consulship. At Abell's instance, the Turrills found temporary quarters in the Brewer house, while Ten Eyck (Mrs. T. E. was dying of tuberculosis) went to William Hooper's. Turrill left the consular business with Abell while his guest, as a return for hospitality. Trouble soon surfaced. According to Turrill's daughter (who was on the scene), the new consul wouldn't listen to Abell's "incendiary political schemes." Turrill then moved to J. B. McClurg's rental. Abell got McClurg to raise the rent nearly \$400, and after ten days the Turrills left.⁹

The "changes of command" occurred on June 20 and July 1. Turrill's introduction posed no problem. But in the case of Ten Eyck, who would present the "bride"? Commodore Stockton suggested reincarnating Brown just for this purpose. Ricord fussed, but Stockton's plan won out. Brown did his job in a short paragraph, left Honolulu with his "tall young son" on August 5, and was never seen again. Abell and Wyllie exchanged brief but courteous notes. Wyllie was ready to "let bygones be bygones"; he attributed Abell's difficulties to the "insidious advice" of others (read Brown). The Abell-Brown relationship defies exact analysis. As early as September 4, 1845, Abell knew that Ten Eyck of Detroit was coming out to replace Brown. He wrote: "I am glad of it heartily for I don't like the man [Brown]." And again: "I don't know Mr. T, but *any* change here would be for the better." Yet after Brown left, Abell penned him long letters about doings in California and Honolulu.

Abell took his dismissal philosophically. Promises made by powerful and ranking Democrats in Washington "gave him every reason to hope" that he would remain consul during the Polk administration. But he was realistic enough to expect the ax which axually did fall.¹⁰

As soon as Turrill was in office, Abell launched a determined effort to have himself named vice-consul at Lahaina. Turrill went through the motions. He appointed Abell and forwarded his choice to Hawaiian officials for approval. The answer: NO! Wyllie had made charges to the U.S. government accusing Abell of "systematically impugning Hawaiian laws, opposing the jurisdiction of the authorities, and tampering with witnesses in open court." Only George Brown could be worse. Turrill persisted: was there *any way* to persuade the king and the Privy Council to approve? NO! This surreal episode was a trip to Phonycia. Abell should have known that his chances were nil because (1) in accordance with the custom of the time, Turrill had personally chosen his vice-consul before he left the United States and (2) Hubbard was Turrill's brother-in-law.¹¹

This put the fatty in the fire. Before July ended, Abell wrote that Turrill was "already cordially hated by all the American residents." It was not true. Establishment types such as Charles R. Bishop and William L. Lee thought Turrill had the right stuff. On the other hand, Abell was not alone in disliking his successor. Abell coined nicknames for Turrill: "Bowels" and "Intestines"—terms he used with admirable impartiality. He wrote to Brown: "This last incarnation of intestines has never looked in my face since you left. If he sees me coming up a street, he either turns a corner, or puts his inevitable umbrella down over his adipose face." Abell's explanation for Turrill's condition: When God made the latter, He had only guts on hand. It enraged Abell to see this "imbecile, ignorant and dishonest red wretch . . . puffed in the *Polynesian* at my expense." Abell asserted that during the "business season" a deputation of whalers asked him to draw up a petition demanding Turrill's removal. Abell declined.¹²

In October 1846, the *Harriden* anchored outside Honolulu harbor. The captain did all necessary business with Turrill. He then returned to his ship, but the crew refused to take up the anchor. The captain tried to punish one of the men. The crew resisted and "took the captain forward." The captain came ashore and asked Turrill for help,

but the consul said that he would do nothing until the *Harriden* came inside. James Makee, consigner of the cargo, accompanied the captain to see Turrill, but Bowels wouldn't move. Makee had furnished a couple of rooms over his store for the consulate. After the *Harriden* impasse he said that "when he fitted up these rooms . . . he thought he was going to have a Consul there, but finding nothing but a d——d old fool, he wished the premises vacated as soon as possible."¹³

Brown was gone, but Ten Eyck followed the warpath he blazed. The new commissioner enjoyed Abell's support. When Ten Eyck had been on the job only four months, Abell wrote that T.E. was in the "midst of official contention and difficulty with the scamps [foreigners] who compose this Government, & whom I had so much annoyance & vexatious correspondence with before his arrival."

One of Ten Eyck's first scrapes involved the affairs of the late Ladd and Co. R. S. Kuykendall called it "the one American case that did more than any other to inflame public opinion in Hawaii during the 1840s." Through Ten Eyck's influence, the mess was handed to arbitrators. They met about three evenings a week—and, said Abell, "'tis the theatre of the place. Full houses every night, and frequent applause." Ten Eyck represented Ladd and Co. and sparred with John Ricord. The arbitration ended when Ladd and Co. withdrew. Nobody got anything good. The results were a bitterly divided community, an official reprimand for Ten Eyck, and a new nickname (bestowed by Abell) for Judge Andrews: "Rev. Rhadamanthus." The "real" Rhadamanthus was a mythical jurist of astounding wisdom.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Turrill basked in the sun of official delight. A letter to President Polk explained all: "We should deal more liberally with this people than did [France and England], leaving the Courts untouched, the tenure of real estate & the discharge of seamen should also in my judgment be left entirely to the operation of local laws." While the Hawaiian government crooned "Never Knew Love Like This Before," Abell and company sharpened their weapons—in this case, pens. On September 2, 1846, Honolulu awoke to peruse the first number of the *Sandwich Islands News*, the organ of the opposition, generally played with all stops out and the swell box wide open. Its high resolve, enunciated by one Dickman: "What I know to be

true, that will I declare; and what I feel it my duty to represent, that will I have the boldness to publish." Actually, the *Sandwich Islands News* drew constant accusations of monumental lying. Conversely, the *Sandwich Islands News's* purpose was to keep the *Polynesian* "from lying too much" and to give "publicity to the many unjust and arbitrary acts which have been committed by the men who control the King and his government." Quite possibly everybody was lying—certainly not an unusual situation.¹⁵

The starting editorial lineup was "a committee of foreign residents," including Abell; R. C. Janion, a British businessman; and J. B. deFiennes, a Belgian lawyer—all chosen to avoid the appearance of national bias. Peter A. Brinsmade took an active role and after Abell's withdrawal was in control. A red-hot dissident, he escalated the level of personal vituperation. James Peacock printed. *Sandwich Islands News* subscribers bought a press, lots of type, and other material from the American mission for about \$1,300. They numbered some twenty men who formed a Sandwich Islands News Association headed by Dr. Robert W. Wood. Leading members included Janion, J. B. McClurg and Co., British Consul William Miller, C. Brewer and Co., William Webster, E. H. Boardman, James Makee, Dr. Wood, James Austin, Eliab Grimes, Punchard and Co., Milo Calkins, and Lieutenant Thomas Stevens. The office was in a coral building lately erected by E. and H. Grimes.

As it worked out, deFiennes did nothing. Janion got subscribers, picked up news, and did what he could. Abell and Brinsmade had nearly all the work. Sarah offered a wife's-eye view: Alex was "playing Editor . . . he scribbles a great deal with a very important air & in fact has become quite a character in the literary world of Honolulu."¹⁶

The *Sandwich Islands News* promised to be a model of restraint. The first issue said that "There are none among us who do not entertain the most sincere respect for the King. . . . We are all influenced by the most friendly sentiments towards the native rulers." It continued:

Though there are few, perhaps none among us who do not disapprove of many late acts committed by foreign officers in the employment of the King, who do not think that much grievous wrong has been done, and great and serious causes of complaint forced upon subjects and

citizens of other countries residing here, yet the commencement of hostilities against these persons, is by no means the object for which this paper is instituted. We shall violently attack no one.

This vehicle of moderation soon fell apart on the rough road of dissent.¹⁷

Regard expressed for His Majesty followed the "official line" of many foreign residents: Hawaiian authority figures were innocent pawns shoved around by unscrupulous self-seekers. This was not entirely flattering, but Abell's personal assessment was even less so. On April 20, 1847, he wrote to his sister: "The King is an ignorant native who cares little for anything but plenty of *poi* (a peculiar food of the natives), a horse to ride, & a uniform coat, and they do what they please, or try to."

These were the 1840s, when the White Man's Burden seemed to grow heavier by the hour. Hence the following:

The aborigines of the Sandwich Islands will not be, and should not be expected to be, an exception to the unvarying fate, thus far, of the dark and inferior varieties of the human race, when brought into contact with the Caucasian family . . . [which should] grasp every suitable occasion to graft upon that [of the native population] which remains the scions of a better race; and throw over and around them the appropriate protection and aliment of a more healthful and thrifty state.

This article urged unrestricted intermarriage of Hawaiians and foreigners.¹⁸

In September 1846, Abell introduced a series of six "Tongataboo Letters" from a not too imaginary South Seas kingdom. These satirized William Richards, John Ricord (twice), and G. P. Judd (twice also). He threw in a letter ridiculing the code of court etiquette established at the end of June 1844. Here John Ricord speaks: "Sir, let me inform you that this is a sovereign and independent kingdom; and that the government of Tongataboo, since the formation of its present ministry, knows no obligation, either in law or precedent, to exhibit any common sense, on any occasion whatever!"

Mid-December 1846 saw Abell listing the *Sandwich Islands News's* accomplishments so far: (1) amused the population; (2) stopped bullock-driving in the streets; (3) roused the Reverend Judge Andrews,

“that personification of judicial imbecility”; (4) most important, “kept the *Polynesian* and Jarves in a tolerable state of respectability.” At this time, the *Sandwich Islands News* counted some three hundred subscriptions—which, with the income from job printing, supported the paper “handsomely.”¹⁹

But congratulatory sentiments did not inspire Hawai‘i’s officialdom: the paper was “seditious and subversive”; “[made the] king’s person and government advisors and ministers, ridiculous”; encouraged resistance among the foreign residents; attacked the kingdom’s laws; tried to “excite hatred” and to “throw ridicule and contempt upon the person and capacity of the king and the character of his government.” Other editors, notably Brinsmade, replaced Abell, but the fight went on through the long Ten Eyck–Wyllie duel over the *Sandwich Islands News* and other matters, the Case of the Stolen Manuscripts, Ten Eyck’s interdiction, and the expiration of the “organ of opposition” at the end of April 1849—when the wages of *SIN* was death.²⁰

Now our focus shifts. In Hawai‘i Abell kept a sharp eye on the bottom line. Why not? He was in his late twenties and trying to establish a family. He felt concern for his ailing father and wanted to put his own siblings beyond poverty’s reach. He wrote scores of letters to stateside kin, though by the end of August 1847 he had got only three. Abell’s devotion to these people and to his wife Sarah cannot be questioned.

He wasted no time in billing the State Department \$520.79 for his expenses during the trip out. In August 1845 he went to Lahaina despite his dread of the uncomfortable interisland vessels. There he took charge and got Waldo settled. He rightly concluded that Lahaina was a more lucrative post than Honolulu. Arrivals of whale-ships:

1845:	Honolulu 163	Lahaina 379
1846:	Honolulu 167	Lahaina 429
1847:	Honolulu 167	Lahaina 239

This explains Abell’s push for the vice-consulship in 1846.

He found that the Honolulu job paid better than expected. His estimate: \$3,000 a year; actual income: about \$9,000. To save money, he did all the consular business himself with the aid of one clerk to record or copy documents. Sky-high living costs rankled: expenses were “very far more than in any place I know in the U. States.” Fur-

ther experience led him to expand this concept to include "the habitable globe."

His consular career over, Abell seized a chance to raise cash. He sold his uniform. The epaulettes went to one; sword, belt, and chains to another. Half a dozen chiefs wanted the full-dress coat and chapian, "but the *poi*-fed animals were all too large and fat to get into them."²¹

As soon as he reached Hawai'i, Abell looked around for business opportunities. Saving paid off; that and some "fortunate speculations" let him put \$8,000 into a partnership he joined in February 1846. But here he picked a couple of lemons from the tree of life. The partners were James B. McClurg and Henry Cheever. R. C. Wyllie wrote that Abell had "sunk himself still deeper by his intimacy" with such lowlifes and that he had "degraded himself in the partnership he has formed." Prophetic words. In November Cheever took to California in the chartered brig *Elizabeth* of Salem a cargo worth about \$35,000. In February 1847 McClurg took another lot of goods. The company's initial shipment was the first to reach California after the American flag went up. Cheever bought the brig *Francisca* and sent her to Honolulu for repair and more cargo. Then McClurg and Cheever sailed the loaded brig back to the Pacific coast, leaving Abell to manage the business in Hawai'i. Prospects looked great: California was the "land of promise" since the American occupation. Immigrants from the States poured in. Another plus: foreign bottoms had to pay a 15 percent ad valorem duty, while American ships entered free.²²

"Double, double toil and trouble": McClurg and Co. dealt in ship chandlery, general merchandise, and Hawaiian produce. Its "stand" near the main wharf occupied former quarters of Ladd and Co. Abell was here when in April 1847 William Heath Davis arrived to be at the deathbed of his mother. He brought nothing from San Francisco for the disappointed partner. But Davis knew that McClurg and Cheever mismanaged affairs. They were "too fond of drinking and enjoying themselves to make a success of it!" In December 1847 McClurg and Co. lost the *Francisca* at Santa Barbara. And Abell thought he had lost his shirt. He hastened to the scene of disaster. McClurg turned out to be a large rodent and Cheever a closely related species. Abell acted to settle the business and end the partnership. It expired by limitation February 2, 1848.²³

Abell returned to Honolulu, but he and Sarah left the islands on the U.S.S. *Independence* September 21, 1848. They were bound for California via Tahiti and Valparaiso. There tragedy struck. Sarah, too ill to be taken ashore, died aboard the *Independence* on Christmas Eve, 1848. Abell pushed on to California alone. Back in Honolulu, E. H. Boardman, a watchmaker and jeweler, was "acting father mother and nurse" to the Abell children. Abell prospered. At the end of February 1851, Boardman took the children to California, where their father was "making money."²⁴

Abell became a permanent and prominent resident of San Francisco—a three-time president of the Society of California Pioneers, for four years commissioner of immigration, a state senator in the 14th session (1861), chairman of the Republican state central committee (1875–1879), for eight years grand commander of the California Commandery No. 1, Knights Templar, and for more than thirty-five years grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons of California.

Abell died at his home, 1027 Washington Street, on the morning of December 28, 1890. He left two daughters, Mrs. C. M. Bailey (wife of an Army captain) and Mrs. C. S. (Emily) Tripler, and an estate worth about \$120,000. Emily's marriage tied Abell to the family of Brevet Brigadier General Charles Stuart Tripler (1806–1866), honored by Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu. C.S. junior was arrested for forgery in February 1889. He and Emily divorced in October 1891. Their son, a third Charles Stuart Tripler, was thus Alexander Abell's grandson.

On New Year's Day, 1891, Abell enjoyed "one of the most impressive funeral ceremonies ever held in [San Francisco]" and one of the biggest in recent years. The family plot in historic Laurel Hill Cemetery commanded a sweeping view of Abell's adopted city and the distant bay.²⁵

NOTES

¹ Ralph Moody, *Stagecoach West* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967) 311; *San Francisco Chronicle* 7 and 26 May 1904; Horace A. Abell, *Abell Family in America* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1940) 109, 144–45; Robert Seager II, *And Tyler Too* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) 226, 236, 589; Society of California Pioneers, "In Memoriam: Alexander G. Abell," Dearborn Historical Museum; *San*

- Francisco Chronicle* 29 Dec. 1890; FO & Ex, 16 Sept. 1845; *P* 16 Aug. 1845; Passport #109, 14 Aug. 1848, and Abell to father, 27 Aug. 1845, both in File M442, AH. Letters to Abell's family are in same file unless otherwise noted.
- ² Abell to father, 27 Aug. 1845; *P* 13 Sept., 18 Oct. 1845; Elizabeth D. Van Denburgh, *My Voyage in the United States Frigate Congress* (New York: Desmond FitzGerald, 1913) 24, 323, 326.
- ³ Abell to father, 27 Aug. 1845; Abell to sister Sophia, 21 June 1846; Abell to sister Augusta, 20 July 1846; Abell to Augusta, 30 Nov. 1846; Abell to father, 4 Feb. 1847; Abell to Augusta, 20 Apr. 1847; also in File M442: Abell to Hon. Wm. Woodbridge, 10 Oct. 1845; Sarah Abell to "My Dear Sister," 10 Nov. 1846; Sarah to Augusta, 21 Apr. 1847.
- ⁴ Abell to Hon. Wm. Woodbridge, 24 Sept. 1845; Abell to father, 30 Sept. 1845; Abell to Augusta, 20 Apr. 1847; FO & Ex, 16 Sept. 1845; *P* 20, 27 Sept. 1845; Abell to Secretary of State James Buchanan, 4, 20 Sept. 1845, Despatches from United States Consuls in Honolulu, 1820-1903 (Washington: National Archives, 1949), microfilm, roll 2 (hereafter cited as CD).
- ⁵ Introduction, roll 1, CD; Kamehameha III and chiefs to president of the United States, 21 Nov. 1837, roll 1; P. A. Brinsmade to Secretary of State John Forsyth, 12 May 1848, roll 1; Wm. Hooper to Mataiao Kekūānao'a, 27 Aug. 1844, Kekūānao'a to Hooper, 28 Aug. 1844, roll 2; Hooper to Kekūānao'a, 25 Feb. 1845, roll 2; Hooper to U.S. secretary of state, 15 July 1845, roll 2; R. C. Wyllie to Hooper, 29 July 1845, roll 2; Abell to Secretary of State Buchanan, 1 July 1846, roll 3. All above in CD. FO & Ex, 8 July 1845; *P* 16, 30 Aug., 13 Sept. 1845, 7 Feb. 1846; Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1, 1778-1854, *Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1957) 167, 189-91, 254-55.
- ⁶ *P* 9 Sept., 13 Dec. 1845; H. L. Sheldon, "Reminiscences of Honolulu," no. 10, *Saturday Press* 2.11; Abell to George Brown, 25 Aug. 1846, George Brown Coll., HHS.
- ⁷ Abell to R. C. Wyllie, 26, 29 Dec. 1845; Lorrin Andrews to Abell, 25 Dec. 1845; Abell to Andrews, 26, 27 Dec. 1845; Abell to Wyllie, 31 Dec. 1845; Abell to Buchanan, 4 Feb. 1846. All in roll 3, CD; *P* 20 Sept., 13 Dec. 1845, 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 Jan., 7 Feb. 1846; FO & Ex, 6, 7 Feb. 1846; PCR 1:104 A-D, 107, 109; Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* 1:250, 256, 375.
- ⁸ *SIN* 23 Sept. 1846; Sheldon, "Reminiscences."
- ⁹ *P* 13 June 1846: Van Denburgh, *My Voyage* 1, 3, 9, 22, 320-21, 324-25, 337.
- ¹⁰ Abell to father, 4 Sept. 1845; Abell to Hon. Wm. Woodbridge, 11 Sept. 1845; Abell to Sophia, 21 June 1846; Abell to Augusta, 20 July 1846, 20 Apr. 1847; Stephen Reynolds's Journal, 10, 18, 24, 29 June 1846 (hereafter cited as SR); FO & Ex, 17 Sept. 1845, 1, 2 July 1846; Abell to Buchanan, 1 July 1846, roll 3, CD; *P* 13, 27 June 1846.
- ¹¹ FO & Ex, 6, 7 Feb., 3, 4, 6, 7, 14 July 1846; PCR, 1:171, 175; Van Denburgh, *My Voyage* 3; SR, 3, 7 July 1846.
- ¹² Abell to Augusta, 20 July 1846; Abell to Brown, 25 Aug. 1846.
- ¹³ Abell to Brown, 1 Oct. 1846.

- ¹⁴ Abell to Brown, 25, 26 Aug., 13 Dec. 1846; Abell to Augusta, 30 Nov. 1846; Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* 1:251–55.
- ¹⁵ Abell to Augusta, 20 Apr. 1847; Abell to Brown, 25 Aug. 1846; *SIN* 2 Sept. 1846, 2 June 1847, 26 Oct. 1848; Turrill to Polk, 28 Aug. 1847, “The Turrill Collection,” *Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for the Year 1957* (Honolulu: Advertiser Pub. Co., 1958) 31.
- ¹⁶ Abell to Brown, 25 Aug., 13 Dec. 1846; H. L. Sheldon, “Reminiscences”; Sarah to “My Dear Sister,” 10 Nov. 1846.
- ¹⁷ *SIN* 2 Sept. 1846.
- ¹⁸ Abell to Augusta, 20 Apr. 1847; *SIN* 16 Sept. 1846.
- ¹⁹ Abell to Brown, 13 Dec. 1846; *P* 23 Aug. 1845; *SIN* 30 Sept., 7, 14, 21 Oct., 18, 25 Nov., 2 Dec. 1846.
- ²⁰ FO & Ex, 4 Nov. 1846, 23, 27 July 1847, 7, 8, 9, 13, 27 Dec. 1848; PCR, 2:115, 3A:251; Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* 1:377.
- ²¹ Abell to Augusta, 30 Nov. 1846, 20 Apr. 1847; Abell to father, 27 Aug. 1845; Abell to the secretary of state, 31 Aug. 1845, roll 2, CD; Abell to Hon. Wm. Woodbridge, 11 Sept. 1845; Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* 1:307.
- ²² Abell to father, 27 Aug., 4 Sept. 1845; Abell to Brown, 2 Oct., 13 Dec. 1846; Abell to Augusta, 20 Apr. 1847; R. C. Wyllie to Thos. Eldredge, 1 Sept. 1847, FO & Ex; *F* 15 July 1846.
- ²³ *Californian* 15 Mar. 1848, cited in File M442, AH; SR, 3 Jan. 1848; *F* 15 July 1846; William Heath Davis, *Seventy-Five Years in California . . .*, ed. Harold A. Small (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1967) 227.
- ²⁴ *F* 1 Oct. 1848; C. R. Bishop to Turrill, 29 Feb. 1851. “Turrill Collection” 39; *Boston Transcript* 4 June 1913 (*Boston Transcript* Item #1162, Language, Literature and History Section, Hawai‘i State Library).
- ²⁵ Society of California Pioneers, “In Memoriam”; *San Francisco Chronicle* 29 Dec. 1890, 2 Jan. 1891, 7 and 26 May 1904; *San Francisco Call* 5, 7 and 9 Feb. 1889, 23 Oct. 1891 (in California Information File, 1846–1985, Hawai‘i State Library); William Ritchie to Col. H. H. Twitchell, C.O., Tripler Gen. Hosp., 20 Sept. 1948, copy in Administrative File, AH.